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ABSTRACT

Two hypotheses were tested to see if feminists would evaluate male-characteristic and female-characteristic traits differently than would nonfeminists and if they would rate fewer traits as descriptive of only one sex. Undergraduates rated a set of adjectives for appropriateness to men and women, appropriateness to blacks and whites, or for social desirability. Dempewolff's (1973) Feminism II Scale then dichotomized the sample into feminists and nonfeminists. The feminists were found to rate fewer traits as characteristic of only men or of only women, and more traits as characteristic of both than did nonfeminists. Both feminists and nonfeminists evaluated most traits as either neutral or slightly positive. Additionally, no sex differences were found. (Author)

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Images of Men and Women:

Comparing Feminists and Nonfeminists

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Images of Men and Women:
Comparing Feminists and Nonfeminists

In the last ten years, there has been increasing interest in the role of women in society. Some groups are trying to promote "traditional" feminine virtues, while others, feminists, are interested in widening women's role. Feminists' major goals are to reduce discrimination against women and increase opportunities for women. In order to implement these goals, feminists have tried to revise discriminatory laws, business and educational policies, and to change the image of women in American society. Feminists claim that women's image as well as social and legal practices reduce opportunities for women.

Research evidence supports the feminist contention that women are seen in a stereotyped way (Broverman, Broverman, Clarkson, Rosenkrantz, & Vogel, 1970; Fernberger, 1948; Komarovsky, 1950; McKee & Sherriffs, 1957; Rosenkrantz, Vogel, Bee, Broverman & Broverman, 1968; Sherriffs & Jarrett, 1953; Sherriffs & McKee, 1957; Elman, Press & Rosenkrantz, Note 1). For example, Rosenkrantz et al. (1968) found that both men and women rated women as gentle, quiet, needing security, neat, interested in their appearance, talkative, and religious. Descriptors such as leader, strong and capable are more similar to the stereotyped image of men (Rosenkrantz et al., 1968). Not only is the image of women different from the image of valuable roles in our society, but also the traits and characteristics seen as particularly descriptive of women have been found to be less positively evaluated then men's traits (Goldberg, 1968; McKee & Sherriffs, 1957, 1959; Pheterson, Kiesler & Goldberg, 1971; Rosenkrantz et al., 1968).

Some feminists, therefore, see a link between changing the position of women in our society and changing the stereotyped image of women. Specifically, they want a more flexible, less stereotyped image of women, while still emphasizing the value of women's traditional traits. The concern of this research was to see if people who agree with the feminist aims of changing women's political, economic, and social position, also have accepted the image of women that feminists are promoting. Specifically, do people who accept feminist principles (feminists) have a less stereotyped and more positive image of women than do people who disagree with feminist goals (nonfeminists)?

Using a general list of traits, the Adjective Check List (ACL), it was hypothesized that feminists would rate fewer characteristics as descriptive of males and females only, and more characteristics as equally applicable to both men and women than would nonfeminists. Additionally, it was hypothesized than feminists would have a more positive evaluation of those characteristics most people rate as descriptive of women and a less positive evaluation of those characteristics most people rate as descriptive of men than would nonfeminists.

Method

Subjects

The subjects were 85 male and 96 female undergraduate sutdents enrolled in introductory psychology and philosophy classes at a large midwestern state university. The data of an additional nine students who did not complete all instruments were eliminated from the analysis.

Instruments

Adjective Check List. The ACL (Gough, 1952) is a 300-adjective self

report instrument used to measure a number of different personality traits. Rather than using the standard instructions, three separate sets of instructions were devised for this study. These instructions are described in the procedures section.

Feminism II Scale. Dempewolff's Feminism II Scale (1973) was used to dichotomize the sample of subjects into feminists and nonfeminists. This is a 56-item scale having questions dealing with equal ability and freedom of action for women, traditional social conduct for women, women's role in the family, and women's legal and business ability. The instrument has an internal consistency of .96. Subjects rate on a 4-point scale the extent to which they agree or disagree with each item. Half of the scale items are reversed to control for response sets.

Procedure

The ACL was administered with three sets of instructions. The instructions on Form A were to rate each adjective as being primarily descriptive of men, of women, or equally descriptive of both men and women. Form B instructed participants to rate each adjective as being primarily descriptive of blacks, of whites, or equally descriptive of both whites and blacks. Form C had participants rate, on a 5-point scale, how positive, good or desirable each adjective was.

The range of Feminism II scores was from 92 to 224. Possible scores on the test range from 56 to 224. The 58 women and 33 men who scores above the median were classified as feminists and the 38 women and 52 men scoring below the median were classified as nonfeminists. The women's scores were significantly higher than the men's scores (F (1,179) = 14.93, $p < .001$).

Results and Discussion

Comparison of Scores on the Feminism Scale

In order to see if the adjective rating had affected scores on the Feminism II scale, scores on this scale were compared across groups of subjects who had taken one of the ACL forms previously, and those who had taken no ACL form. A one way analysis of variance revealed no main effect for the type of previous task. Mean feminism scores for the four groups ranged from 165.5 to 174.6.

Stereotyping

The first hypothesis was that feminists would rate more traits as equally descriptive of both men and women and fewer traits as characteristic of only men or only women than would nonfeminists. A 2-way analysis of variance procedure was used to study the effects of Feminism and Sex of rater on the number of adjectives rated as characteristic of men, women, or both. The mean number of adjectives participants rated as characteristic of males, characteristic of females, and characteristic of both, based on ACL Form A date, are presented in Table 1. The results of the analysis of variance are presented in Table 2.

As hypothesized feminists rated significantly fewer traits as characteristic only of men or as characteristic only of women than did nonfeminists. Also, as hypothesized, feminists selected significantly more traits as equally descriptive of males and females than did nonfeminists. There were no significant effects due to the rater's sex or to an interaction of Feminism and Sex.

Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here

Evaluation of Male and Female Traits

Definition of male and female traits. In order to compare the desirability of the traits that are a part of the male and female stereotypes, it was necessary to define traits which were primarily characteristic of males and primarily characteristic of females. A trait was defined as characteristic of males or characteristic of females in two ways. In the first way, 50% or more of all subjects completing ACL Form A rated the trait as characteristic of males or females. In the second way, 50% or more of the subjects in each of the four groups who completed Form A (feminist females, feminist males, nonfeminist females, nonfeminist males) rated the trait as characteristic of males or females. These data show that even though feminists ascribe fewer stereotyped adjectives to men and to women than do nonfeminists, both groups still ascribe some traditional stereotyped adjectives to both women and men.

Insert Table 3 about here

These male and female traits are presented in Table 4. The traits so defined are very similar to those rated as characteristic of males or females in s stufy by Rosenkrantz et al., (1968). While the lists are not identical, both present similar stereotypes of males and females.

Evaluation of the traits. It was hypothesized that feminists would rate the female traits more positively and the male traits less positively than

would nonfeminists. In order to test this hypothesis, we compared the mean desirability ratings of the male and female stereotypic adjectives. Since the subjects hwo made these desirability ratings, using Form C, rated both male and female adjectives, a repeated measures analysis of variance procedure was used. This procedure compared subjects' mean desirability ratings of the male and female traits defined in the two ways previously discussed. In addition, a 2-way analysis of variance (Sex x Feminism) procedure was used to compare subjects' desirability ratings of each of these male and female traits.

The data do not support the hypothesis. Feminists and nonfeminists did not differ in their ratings of the traits, nor did either group rate male traits differently than female traits. There were no significant effects due to the sex of the rater or as a result of the interaction between Sex of rater and Feminism. Mean desirability ratings for the combined male-stereotypic traits and the cobimed female-stereotypic traits are presented in Table 4.

Insert Table 4 about here

Using traits not initially selected to be particularly descriptive of either men or women, the evidence shows that feminists and nonfeminists do not differ in their evaluations of female-stereotyped traits or male-stereotyped traits. As shown in Table 4, both sets of characteristics are consistently rated as neutral to moderately positive. This finding contrasts sharply with previous research (McKee & Sherriffs, 1957; Rosenkrantz et al., 1968) showing

a clearly more favorable evaluation of men's characteristics, and suggests that a change could have occurred in the eight years since the Rosenkrantz et al. study. They found that most male traits, about 50%, were rated as socially desirable while only about 30% of female traits were rated as desirable. Our findings of neutral evaluations of both male and female traits suggest that there may have been a general reduction in the positive evaluat-ons of male traits and a general increase in the positive evaluations of female traits. The finding of fairly neutral stereotypes of men and women is consistent with the finding (Karlins, Coffman & Walters, 1968) that stereotypes of many social groups have not changed, but the evaluation of these stereotypes has become less extreme over time.

The finding of feminists' equal evaluation of male and female traits has some interesting implications. One criticism made of feminists is that they support women by belittling men's characteristics. The findings show that feminists in our study seem to have accepted a key aspect of feminist idealogy--that women and men are equally valuable.

A second interesting finding concerns the nonfeminists' ratings of male and female traits. These people evaluated men's and women's traits similarly, rather than favoring men's traits, which had been the case in previous research. This may be the result of the public attention given to the views of active feminists. It may be that it is no longer socially acceptable to derogate women and favor men. This argument is consistent with some recent research showing no differences in the evaluation of identical work done by men and women (Levenson, Burford, Bonno & David, 1975), and no differences in the evaluation of the performance capabilities of men and women (Hough & Allen, 1975).

If reported attitudes about women have improved, it is still open to question whether these reports represent true changes in attitudes or merely a recognition of the currently fashionable attitudes toward women. Even if the latter is the case, people's awareness that inequality between men and women is no longer socially acceptable is a hopeful sign for women. The awareness that inequality is inappropriate is a likely start in the process of reducing that inequality.

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Table 1

Mean Number of Adjectives Subjects Taking ACL Form A Rates as Masculine, Feminine or Descriptive of Both Males and Females

Group	Rated masculine	Rated feminine	Rated both
Feminists			
Females	37.9	55.7	204.8
Males	52.4	46.0	199.9
Nonfeminists			
Females	60.8	68.4	169.4
Males	74.0	68.4	157.4

Table 2

Analysis of Variance for Number of Adjectives Rated Characteristic of Men, Women, or Both

Variable	Source	df	MS	F
Adjectives characteristic of men	Feminism (A)	1	7993.2	6.24*
	Sex of rater (B)	1	3086.6	2.41
	A x B	1	6.3	.005
	Within Cell	63	1281.4	
Adjectives characteristic of women	Feminism (A)	1	4650.4	3.76*
	Sex of rater (B)	1	257.3	.21
	A x B	1	371.9	.30
	Within cell	63	1236.3	
Adjectives characteristic of both	Feminism (A)	1	23834.6	5.19*
	Sex of rater (B)	1	1359.9	.30
	A x B	1	198.9	.04
	Within cell	63	4588.2	

*$p < .05$.

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations of the Desirability Ratings of Masculine and Feminine Traits

Trait	M	SD
	Characteristic of males[a]	
Aggressive[b]	2.91	.95
Boastful	4.15	.81
Coarse	3.61	.84
Courageous	2.03	.87
Daring	2.57	.81
Dominant	3.18	1.09
Egotistical[b]	3.82	1.13
Forceful	2.97	1.06
Handsome[b]	2.17	.81
Hard-headed	3.59	1.05
Headstrong	3.49	.94
Industrious	1.93	.69
Masculine[b]	2.29	.94
Strong	2.20	.88
Tough	2.89	.94

(Continued on next page)

Trait	M	SD
	Characteristic of females[a]	
Affectionate[b]	1.74	.60
Charming	2.23	.78
Complaining	4.10	.83
Dreamy	3.03	.91
Emotional[b]	2.70	.95
Fearful	3.57	.67
Feminine	2.61	.97
Fickle	3.82	.85
Fussy	3.82	.89
Meek	3.33	.91
Nagging	4.41	.82
Poised	2.21	.61
Sensitive[b]	2.22	.91
Sentimental	2.18	.71
Softhearted	2.28	.87
Talkative	2.60	.89

Note. Maximum score = 5.00.

[a]The lower the score, the most positive the rating.

[b]Rated by 50% of the subjects in each group (male feminists, female

feminists, male nonfeminists, female nonfeminists) who completed Form A as either masculine or feminine, and rated by 50% of all subjects as masculine or feminine. Those traits with no superscript only met the latter criterion.

Table 4

Mean Desirability Ratings of Combined Masculine and Combined Feminine Adjectives

Group	Mean ratings of adjectives	
	Masculine adjectives[a]	Feminine adjectives[b]
Feminists		
Female	2.93	3.02
Male	2.39	2.72
Nonfeminists		
Female	2.89	2.79
Male	2.67	2.73

Note. Maximum rating = 5.00. The lower the score, the more positive the rating.

[a]These adjectives were rated by 50% of all students as masculine.

[b]These adjectives were rated by 50% of all students as feminine.